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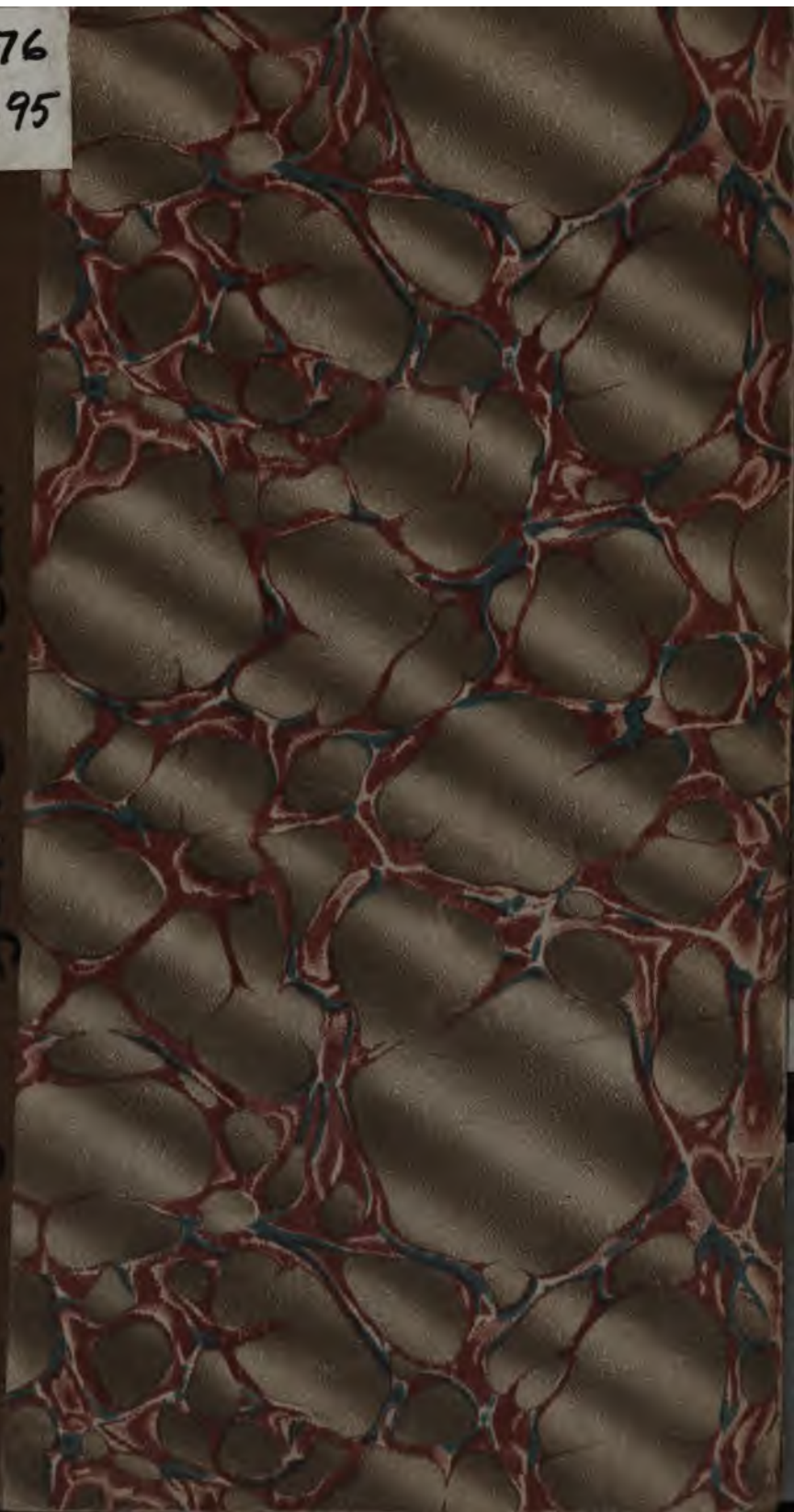
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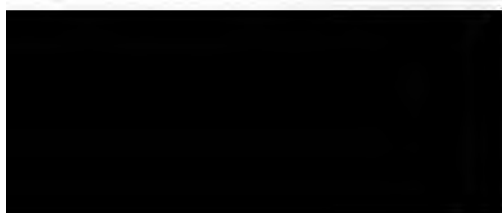
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AGATHA;

OR, THE

Convent of St. Bartholomew:

A TRAGEDY.

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

EDWYN ANDREW BURNABY, Esq.

WRITTEN IN AUGUST, 1819. PREVIOUS TO THE LATE REVOLUTION
IN SPAIN.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CAPTAIN BELMONT, *Husband to Agatha.*

ABBOT OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

FRIAR LAWRENCE.

FRIAR PETER.

CORPORAL TRUSTY, *Servant to Captain Belmont.*

JACK HEARTY, *an English Sailor.*

ANTONIO, *a Guerilla.*

AGATHA, *a Nun, married to Captain Belmont.*

ABBESS OF ST. AGNES.

ABBESS OF ST. MARY.

CLARA, *a Nun, Friend to Agatha.*

LAURA, *a Spanish Peasant Girl, formerly a Lady's
Maid in an English Family.*

Friars, Nuns, Executioners, &c. &c.



AGATHA;
OR, THE
CONVENT OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A Street in Cadiz.*

CORPORAL TRUSTY.

A PRETTY taking we are all in to be sure. My poor mistress seized and carried to a convent, God knows where — my master a prisoner in gaol — and I, as good as one — and to be served so, after having fought for this cursed ungrateful country. Well, for my part, I wish we were all safe out of the mess.

Enter JACK HEARTY.

Jack Hearty. How d'ye do, Corporal? what is all this combustion about? — They say as how your master is to be hanged, and your mistress to be buried or burned alive.

have taught them better. But tell me, Corporal, how came your master to be taken prisoner ; and why are he and his wife to be put to death ?

Corporal. Hark'ye, Jack, and I'll tell you how it was.

Jack Hearty. (*aside.*) Take me prisoner ; a mighty good joke indeed.

Corporal. Well, as I was going to say ; His honor, my good master, served all the war in Spain, and fought as a brave man should do.

Jack Hearty. Aye, I always thought him one. He's not one of your runaway white-feathered rascals.

Corporal. No, not he ; he's true game, depend upon it. As the song says, he fought for love and glory.

Jack Hearty. Always loved a pretty girl. Corporal, you and I do the same, you know.

Corporal. To be sure we do, Jack, and that makes the

girls love us. Well, one day His honor chanced to see a great fellow — a Mounsheer — a Frenchman I mean, Jack, behaving bad, very bad indeed, to a nice pretty young woman — a nun they call her : so what does master do, but he draws his sword, runs Mounsheer through, and rescues the lady.

Jack Hearty. And quite right he served him too — free choice on both sides, I say. There's plenty in most places. •

Corporal. And so His honor thought ; for he has always said it was a shame to use a woman ill ; and that he would run any rascal through if he found him treating a woman so basely.

Jack Hearty. Aye, your master is a fine fellow — a true Englishman every inch of him.

Corporal. Well, Jack, the lady was overpowered with gratitude ; she thanked master again and again, and said she should love him for ever.

Jack Hearty. Aye, aye, I see how it is ; she held out the signal, and His honor answered it. Well, well, no harm there : I always answer a signal made by a pretty girl.

Corporal. Aye, Jack, but His honor did not answer it in that way. He made her his wife, and a happier pair there never was. So after they were married, she was with him during all the campaign in Spain and France, and thence went to England. There he left her, when he was ordered again abroad, and at Waterloo he lost his arm.

Jack Hearty. The Captain did right, he left his lady in a Christian country. No place like old England, Corporal.

Corporal. After we returned from Waterloo, we

Corporal. I wish so too ; and our toast would spring as truly from our hearts, as it does from theirs who drink it in wine, with three times three.

Jack Hearty. Or I'll be d——d, Corporal. Well, I hope you gave the enemy a licking.

Corporal. No, Jack. we did not. The Patriots were raw soldiers : they'll fight well in time.

Jack Hearty. For certain they will ; they must have their learning. What then, did they run away ?

Corporal. Yes, Jack, they ran away ; and His honor, his good lady, and I, were taken prisoners, and carried before the Spanish general ; and a sad job it was, for he knew my master, having served with him in Spain, and all about his wife. So he sent us to Spain, to be hanged or burned, as a reward I suppose for having fought in his country's cause.

Jack Hearty. Oh, Corporal, how I wish there was another Spanish war. To be sure I would not give

these Dons a little British thunder. But how came you to be at large ?

Corporal. Why you must know, Jack, that our Ambassador having heard the case from His honor, who wrote to him, has got me my liberty, with permission to wait upon master ; and has promised besides to do all he can for him, and to come and see him.

Jack Hearty. Well, then, there are still some hopes I see : mayhap he may get your master and mistress out of this scrape, and then you shall all come on board our vessel, and we will waft you back to the land of liberty, which I shall always love, and for which I will gladly fight while I have a drop of blood left in this heart.

Corporal. So say I, Jack ; may British soldiers and sailors ever be friends ; and may you by sea, and we by land, be the terror of our enemies. But I fear, should master get off, my poor lady will not, and then what will His honor do : I'm sure he'll not live long ; for though he shuns no danger, and fears no hardship, yet his heart is kind and good — he loves his wife so true — that to have caused her death will quite overwhelm him. And mark my words, if one grave does not contain them, 'twill be because their place of death is so distant, that their friends will be unable to lay their bodies in the same tomb.— But (*pulling out his watch*) it is time to go to my poor master, he will be rising from his dreary bed.

Jack Hearty. And I'll aboard. (*As he goes out, to himself.*) I'll be d——d if I don't revenge their cause.

[*Exeunt.*

Had noon appear'd, before black clouds arose,
And tempests howl'd, foreseen not till they broke,
And in one wide and desolating ruin,
O'erwhelm'd us all.

As for myself I feel not —
But to have involv'd an angel woman,
And a sweet child, the offspring of our love,
In this so sad catastrophe — is more
Than sternest human nature can endure.
And then the death that Agatha awaits —
A death invented by some fiend from hell,
And thence engrafted on th' accursed code
Of grim, unnatural, monastic life.

[*Beating his forehead.*]

Great God, have pity on my Agatha.
And if there should be aught of wickedness
In having broken this monastic vow,
On my devoted head thy utmost wrath

Inflict ; but spare my lovely Agatha.—
 Oh ! you poor Spaniards — for whom British blood
 Has flow'd in streams, that had you but been wise,
 Nor into slavish superstition sunk,
 Would have enrich'd your soil for centuries,
 And rais'd you to the dignity of men —
 Speak, is it so, that you your friends reward ?
 Are all our toils, our wounds, our sufferings,
 Our broken-hearted widows, orphans' tears, —
 Whose husbands' and whose fathers' sacred bones
 Give to your land an int'rest which before
 Your land possess'd not — thus — thus — required ?
 Have you so soon forgot the sacred cause
 Of liberty, for which with British aid
 You late so nobly fought ? and in its stead
 A scepter'd bigot welcome to his throne ;
 With all the emblems of superstition —
 The cowls — the hoods — the stern celibacy
 Which war against the first and great command
 That God to Adam gave ? — Have you so soon
 Forgotten then th' example that we set,
 The oaths you took upon your country's shrine ?
 Or rather does some momentary spell
 Only enslave you — which whene'er it breaks
 Will once again restore you to the rank
 Of freemen ?

Agatha, oh ! my Agatha —
 Perhaps ere now — or at this same moment —
 Thou art thy blessed spirit resigning
 To him who gave it. Angels await thee,
 And now are wafting it to heav'n's glad shores.
 Come then, grim death — strike quick, I welcome thee ;
 Strike — and bid all my earthly sorrows cease.

For all your ills, and wish I had the pow'r
To heal them.

Belm. What then, our doom is fix'd — let it be so.
Death to a soldier gives not much alarm —
'Tis too familiar. I am well prepar'd,
And so is Agatha — if indeed there's need
Of preparation for an angel.

Ambas. She is an angel.

Belm. (hastily.) What, then, she is dead.
Th' accursed tyrants now have had their gorge
Of base revenge. Quick lead me on, ye guards,
To execution. —

Each moment I shall live will seem an age,
Till in that clime where sorrow is not known,
I do rejoin my Agatha.

Ambas. Not so, my friend — your Agatha is not dead.

Belm. Is she then pardon'd — has your friendly aid
Been thus successful. — I am content to die.

But will you be her friend ; and, with her child,
Convey her safe to England's gen'rous shores,
Where ne'er in vain the mournful widow sues ?

Ambas. Whate'er you ask I'd grant, had I the pow'r ;
But here I fear, alas ! I have it not.—
Your Agatha still lives — but of her doom
No pardon or remission can I get.
Monastic laws are here so strict enforc'd,
That e'en the King himself, had he the will,
A pardon could not grant.
Yours he has granted, and you hence are free.

Belm. I spurn his pardon — altho' I thank you.
Depriv'd of Agatha, life's not worth having.
Death now becomes to me a welcome friend.

Ambas. But, my good Sir, you have an infant child,
To whom you owe a duty.

Belm. It is most true — and for my child I'd live ;
Could I with honor live. That I cannot.
I too well knew that Agatha was a nun ;
And was aware the risk this angel ran ;
In yielding to my love. Had I been man,
And o'er my passions kept the guard I ought,
I should have suffer'd anguish — all the ills
Which a true lover ever did endure,
Ere I on this sweet woman had prevail'd
To have incurr'd a risk so terrible.—
How can a soldier, then, to honor bred,
Accept his life, if here he forfeited ?
As for my child — it is a soldier's child :—
If I should die, to England it belongs ;
And England is too gen'rous to allow
The soldier's orphan e'er to want a home.

But, my good friend, be not too much buoy'd up
With hope ; for never hitherto, 'tis said,
Did the devoted victim 'scape his fate.

Corp. Never mind, your honor, his Excellency has
done all he can — leave the rest to Corporal Trusty and
Jack Hearty.

Ambas. Where is the gaoler ?

Corp. What ho ! Gaoler !

Enter GAOLER.

Ambas. Signor, I here deliver unto you
The Royal Mandate, that this brave Captain
From your safe custody be hence discharg'd.

Gaoler. Most gladly I obey ; for, Sir, believe,
To render service to an Englishman
Gives me great pleasure. With them oft I've fought,

And gladly would again, for liberty.
 Necessity alone assigns to me
 This dreadful office — whose bitter sorrows
 Can only then alleviation know,
 When I can minister to the distressed.
 But never since I held these fatal keys,
 Have I known joy so true as I feel now,
 When I unlock these massy prison doors,
 And give again to liberty and life
 So truly excellent and good a man
 As this brave Englishman.

[*Goes to the door — Scene changes.*]

SCENE III.

A principal Street in Cadiz : Spaniards passing to and fro — Girls playing on Guitars, others Dancing.

Jack Hearty. God bless you, my dear Laura, how I rejoice to meet you. (*Shakes hands with her.*)

Laura. Oh, Signor! and are you returned? I never hoped to have seen you more. You know not how Laura has grieved ever since you sailed.

Jack Hearty. And so have I, my love. My heart has been as constant to you, as it has been firm and loyal to my country.

Laura. Ah, Signor! you were always brave and generous. I've looked on the sea day after day, till my eyes could look no longer: and every ship that sailed by have I fancied you were on board.

Jack Hearty. How I love you for that. But, Laura, how is your father and mother?

Laura. (*sighing.*) They are both dead, Signor, and poor Laura is now an orphan.

Laura. I did not say so, Signor.

Jack Hearty. But you meant it — did'nt you.

DUET.

Laura. What tho' I wish with you to go,
I'm sure I did not tell you so :
Sad fate decrees — I must remain —
When you are far away — in Spain.

J. Hearty. By heaven I swear, when I'm away,
In Spain, my love, you shall not stay.
For England you shall sail with me —
At morn our ship will weigh for sea.

Laura. But should I not, when far from home,
A friendless, hapless stranger roam ?
Tho' you protest that now you love,
Faithless perhaps you then would prove.

J. Hearty. If faithless I should ever be,
May I, when next I go to sea,
Sinking beneath the billows' roar,
Find my lone grave afar from shore.

Laura. Oh! could I Signor, you believe —
Altho' my virgin heart would grieve,
To leave my home, and country dear —
With you to sail I would not fear.

J. Hearty. Meet me then here, my love, this night.

Laura. My faith to you I dare not plight.

J. Hearty. I'll not deceive you, love, I swear.

Laura. Ah! my dear Signor, would I dare.

*They embrace, whisper, and go out on one side of the stage,
as CORPORAL TRUSTY enters on the other.*

Corp. Happy Jack Hearty, he is always among the girls; I wish I could join him in his mirth. But I can get no tidings about my mistress. His poor honor is half distracted. However, I will not despair. But who comes here? — it is a face I know.

Enter a Monk, who recognises the Corporal. — They shake hands.

Friar Peter. Much I rejoice to meet you here again.
How is your master, friend? Of his arrest,
And of his glad release, I've also heard.
I have been seeking him for this long hour.

Corp. My good and worthy master is involv'd
In grief, so poignant that it threatens death;
So that the pardon which your gracious King
Has to him granted, may not now avail.
For it alone he values as the means
To save an angel from that brutal death,
Which some of your own order would inflict.

Friar Peter. Aye, tis a grievous death indeed.

Corp. I am now trying if I can discover,

Who say'd my life so late from French
Camps, (dancing with joy.) Then go w
stout, holy father,
And to my good master I'll conduct you
Enter Peter. I will attend you.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

*A distant view of Cadiz, about three miles off, on the right ;
on the left, about a quarter of a mile, a Peasant's
Cottage, with the top of a Convent appearing, about
five miles off, among trees.*

Enter CAPTAIN BELMONT *and* JACK HEARTY.

Jack Hearty.

CHEER up, your honor — all may yet be well.

Belm. My friend, I fear not ; for no tidings yet
Have I been able of my wife to gain.

But who comes yonder with the Corporal ?

Jack Hearty. A monk, your honor.

Enter CORPORAL.

Corp. God bless your honor, I have heard something
about my poor mistress will make your honor's hair
stand on end. Hearty, my boy, there's no time to lose.

Enter FRIAR PETER.

Belm. (starting.) Hail ! reverend father, and is it you ?

Friar Peter. It is, my son ; it is the self same friar

And vow'd a spotless virgin she'd remain—
When from your arms she was so lately torn,
Was to our Convent of St. Bartholomew
Conveyed. Whose top you see among yon woods,
Some five miles hence.

Belm. Then I will go this instant, scale its walls,
Put to the sword all who shall dare resist,
And bear my Agatha in triumph back
To England.

Friar Peter. Forbear, my son; the rash attempt
would fail :

And hear me out; some plan we'll then devise.

Belm. I'll hear you patiently. Holy father
To your sage counsel I will strict attend.

Friar Peter. I saw her carried thro' the sacred porch,
And heard her sob and sigh—then almost wild
And frantic with despair, she loudly call'd
On God to help her—While her fierce gaolers

Bid her, with savage joy, for death prepare,
Exulting in her agony.

Belm. Oh! the base monsters

Corp. and Jack Hearty. Curse them.

Friar Peter. Her cries, her agony, so pierc'd my heart,
That I gave vent to tears — for monks can feel,
Tho' Protestants, 'tis said, believe it not.
And of success — had there been any chance,
My life I'd forfeited or rescued her.

All. Oh! generous father.

Friar Peter. For when I heard her call on husband —
child —

The days of infancy rush'd to my view,
When with my own parents — sisters — brothers —
I sportive play'd; that I abhorr'd mine order,
And almost vow'd I'd hoist rebellion's standard,
And blessed liberty — heav'n's greatest gift —
With all the comforts of domestic life,
Give unto thousands of my fellow creatures,
Who now in dreary, useless solitude
Pine their whole lives away.

Belm. Most noble friar, your words do cheer me.
But of my Agatha give me more tidings.

Friar Peter. My son, thou know'st that by monastic
laws,

A nun who dares to break her virgin vow,
Is doom'd to expiate the great offence
By death — and by a death so terrible,
That it does harrow up my very soul
To think upon it.

Belm. I know it all — go on.

Friar Peter. At eight this ev'ning, then, a conclave
meets;

Nay, were you now within the convent walls,
The place of execution, from the view
Or knowledge of mankind is so conceal'd,
That the shrill cries of the poor sufferer
Cannot above be heard.

Belm. But still, my father, I should be reveng'd;
For in the murd'rer's breasts I'd plunge my sword.
And the same moment which to heav'n consign'd
My Agatha's immaculate spirit,
Should surely doom their murd'rous souls to hell.
(*To Corp. and Jack Hearty.*) Are ye resolved?

Both. We are, your honor,

Friar Peter. My son, be calm —
Courage alone to vict'ry will not lead —
Discretion is a valuable ally.

Belm. 'Tis true, my father, I once more promise
Thy orders to obey.

Friar Peter. Within these convent walls for forty years

I have resided, almost from a boy ;
And from the day which first admitted me,
Until the late invasion of the French,
This donge was kept a secret from us all.
When that took place, and when th' imperial force
Of France bore down upon us, our abbot,
In confidence to those alone he honour'd
With his kind friendship, did the secret tell,
And both its entrance and its outlet shew'd ;
That should the enemy attack our convent,
What was intended as th' abode of death,
A refuge for the living might become.
The en'my, as expected, did advance ;
And with his numerous unhallow'd cohorts,
Our peaceful mansion storm'd. The chosen few
Retreated to this dungeon, where we staid,
Half dead with fear, till gloomy midnight came ;
Then thro' a narrow passage, dark and long,
Our abbot did conduct us — till at length
He stopt, and pressing on a secret spring,
Which to himself was only known — a door
Flew open, and restor'd us to the air.
Some now one way, and some another ran ;
While I my pilgrim steps by chance directed
Unto that spot where, but for thee, my life
Had fall'n a sacrifice to Frenchman's wrath.
That it was sav'd by heav'n, I now believe,
To pay this night the debt of gratitude,
By rescuing from her tomb an angel woman.

Belm. May'st thou speak truly. Onward lead us then.

Friar Peter. My son, it is too soon ; and without care
You'll mar the project. Your lov'd wife still lives,
Nor has yet had the mockery of trial.

Jack Hearty. Agatha alive, or her d—n'd murderers dead.

Belm. In the mean time, my prayers to heaven shall rise —

For trials like these would soon o'erwhelm us,

Did it our broken spirits not support.

He who believes not that there is a God,

Is a poor fool — a piteous idiot —

Not fit to live, but still less fit to die.

Exeunt Capt. Belmont and Corporal.

Manet JACK HEARTY.

Jack Hearty. Well, so think I. At eight to night I'll be here punctually ; and by twelve, His honor and his lady, the Corporal, Laura, and Jack Hearty, will be safe on board, and we shall be weighing anchor. But yonder is the cottage where Laura lives, and the hour

is arrived when I promised to meet her. Well, I'll go, for a British sailor should always be true to his word. [Exit.]

SCENE II.

The Cottage; at whose door Laura is sitting, playing on a Guitar.

SONG. — LAURA.

Ah! what to say I scarcely know —
I wish to stay — yet wish to go.
Dear to me is my native soil,
Tho' I be forc'd for bread to toil.

From Laura should her lover stray,
What can she do when far away?
No, no, no, no, I will not go,
Tho' down my cheeks the tears should flow.

Enter JACK HEARTY.

Jack Hearty. Well, Laura, this is truly kind; you will now consent to go with me to old England.

Laura. No, Signor, I cannot go — dare not go.

Jack Hearty. Dare not, Laura — why should you doubt me?

Laura. Ah! Signor, did I not tell you — can you wonder at my fears, when the fate of the poor Captain's wife is before mine eyes?

Jack Hearty. But her fate can never be yours. You have no one's consent to ask. You are an orphan, Laura — free as the air — and can decide yourself.

Laura. 'Tis true, Signor, my father and mother are dead, but I have an uncle; and what will he say?

Laura. He is, Signor; and I've often heard him say, had Spain the same laws that you have, it would be the finest country in the world to live in.

Jack Hearty. Aye, he is right; old England's laws are good. The richest man dare not there oppress the poorest.

Laura. But here he comes — here comes my good uncle.

Enter ANTONIO; who draws his sword to the sailor.

Antonio. Who art thou?

[*Hearty draws his sword also.*]

Jack Hearty. Oh, that's what you're after, is it. But come on, for d—n me if I'm afraid of you.

[*Laura runs between them.*]

Laura. Forbear, dear uncle; this is the English sailor I told you of.

Antonio. An English sailor, do you say : then (*turning to Jack Hearty*) you are welcome to partake of all I have. I love the English : they are brave and generous. We have often fought together, and I regret much you will not now assist us.

Jack Hearty. For the matter o'that, I should have no objection, if our Government would let us. But I have a favor to ask of you.

Antonio. What is it, friend ?

Jack Hearty. Why, you must know that Laura has a bit of a mind to go with me to England. Will you agree to it ?

Antonio. Laura has not concealed her wish from me. But how are you to maintain her ? She lives poorly here, 'tis true — but she shall never want a protector, so long as I can be one to her.

Jack Hearty. Why, as for that, tho' I am not a braggart, I have saved a little prize money ; and when I get home, and am paid off, shall receive a little more : with that I'll set up a slop shop at Portsmouth — Laura shall then live like a lady.

Antonio. There is something so open and generous in your manner, that I do think I dare trust Laura with you. I too shall be proud to be uncle to an Englishman.

Jack Hearty. Now then, my Laura, it depends upon your consent to make me happy : and if your good uncle pleases, he shall accompany us. My house shall be his also ; and between him and you I will divide my last crust.

Antonio. No, I must remain here ; I have devoted my life to my country's service — for her liberties I am contending. When these are firmly established, Spaniards will be worthy the regard of Englishmen.

free. And now, dear Laura, we will retire to our cottage, where the priest shall unite you to the man you love.

Jack Hearty. And then, my Laura, I'll see you safe on board our ship, and return for the good Captain and his lady.

[*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A Cell in a Convent. AGATHA, elegantly dressed in black, but not as a Nun, at prayer by a dim lamp.— After a short interval she rises.

Agatha.

THANK heav'n, I feel a little more compos'd.
Distress of mind is wanting, ere we know
The consolation that devotion gives.
How gloomy is this cell — how hard that fate
Which to celibacy consigns its inmates.
Yet would to heav'n mine I had never left,
Or known the comforts of domestic life.

[Raising her voice.]

Oh, God! the very thought of what I've lost
Disarms me of all fortitude.
Give me my husband — let me embrace him —
Give me my child — grant the consolation
T' enfold them both within mine arms once more,
Ere that these arms are stiff and cold with death.
Aye, and what a death it is to suffer!
How agonizing, slow, and lingering!
Oh! thou great God! have compassion on me.
Send forth thy minist'ring angels, and take me
Unto thyself; and doom, oh doom me not

To her who has a child and husband lost ;
And who, before the curfew^a shall have toll'd,
Must die herself?

Clara. Ah! 'tis too true—and yet methinks so great
Is Agatha's fortitude, and trust in God,
That still some consolation I can give,
In this abode of human misery.
How has your Clara griev'd from morn till eve,
That ever from our convent you did fly.
Hadst thou remain'd, we still had liv'd together
In sweet retirement, in heav'nly converse ;
Till rich in years, in faith, and pious works,
Thou hadst to God thy grateful spirit resign'd.

^a The curfew, it is true, is unknown in Spain; but as Agatha had been in England, an Anglicism which always so powerfully conveys to the mind both the sublime and beautiful, will, it is presumed, not be considered altogether incorrect.

Agatha. Would I had done so — would I had not
tasted,

Those joys which spring from the endearing ties
Of wife and mother — then had been unknown
Their value and their loss alike to me —
Then had my life been blameless, altho' pass'd
In selfish solitude, and I had sunk
In happy ignorance into my grave.
But, Clara, thou canst testify for me,
That in our walls — so long as they could save
Their wretched inmates from the base assaults
Of man — I did contentedly remain :
Nor did I leave them until forc'd to fly
For safety — not for my poor life alone,
But for what women prize above their lives —
My chastity was threaten'd. Had I staid,
I must have yielded, as too many did,
To violence. Altho' no virgin then,
I still had been consider'd a pure nun.
Of our good sisters what became I know not.
I, a poor wand'ring, helpless stranger, roam'd
Till night came on, then laid me down fatigu'd,
And wept till balmy sleep befriended me.
On the approach of morn I woke, and saw
A Frenchman stand before me, whose stern look,
To one unus'd to man, so much abash'd me,
That I scream'd loud, rose up, and try'd to fly.
He quick pursu'd, and seiz'd me in his arms ;
And I had fall'n a sacrifice to lust,
Had not a gallant Englishman appear'd, ~~who~~
And bravely — nothing valuing his own life —
Sav'd me from ruin.
As soon as I recover'd from the shock,

Man then to me appear'd a different being ;
He seem'd to bear the image of his God.
Can you then, sister Clara, be surpris'd
That love should steal upon me, and efface
The very recollection of my vows ?
Had you, dear Clara, ever seen my Charles,
You would not wonder, to his entreaties
That I did yield me, and became his wife.

Clara. My Agatha, I know not what love means —
My vow forbids me e'er to think of it.

Agatha. Would I had been a stranger too, to love,
I had not then involv'd my child, myself,
And my dear husband, in this misery.
I had remain'd quite happy and content ;
And like the bird that's hatch'd within its cage
Had dream'd not of those joys, now lost to me
For ever. Then in social innocence
Around our garden we had daily roam'd,

Nor known a change but what the seasons brought,
 Or other pleasure than to deck our cells
 With nature's gayest flowers. Now all is lost —
 Child — husband — country — even life itself.

Clara. Tho' ills oppress you, you will still rejoice,
 For selfishness inhabits not thy breast.
 Your husband and your lovely child are safe.

Agatha. Ah! say you so! I do indeed rejoice —
 Death loses half its terrors if they're safe.
 Have then my husband and my child escaped?

Clara. 'The King has pardon'd him most graciously.

Agatha. Long live the King for doing so. On him
 May heaven its choicest blessings shower!

Clara. And for your child.

Agatha. (*wildly staring.*) Where is she? tell me,
 my Clara?

Clara. Your child is now within this convent's walls.

Agatha. Oh! let me see her! let me at my breast
 This inn'cent pledge of our too fatal love
 Once more embrace! let me once more imprint
 Upon those cheeks which Charles again may kiss,
 A token of my love.

Clara. Dear Agatha, with your wishes I'll comply.
 Oh! that I could restore you all to love,
 So perfect and so true. Hard are their hearts
 Who wish to sep'rate you. And can this act
 To heav'n be grateful?

Agatha. My Clara, let me see my child!

Clara. Thou innocent sufferer, I'll obey thee.

[*Goes out.*

Agatha. (*sola.*) What! shall I see my child? I'll
 take it with me!

The monsters shall not sep'rate us again.

What I can do, and long as life remains.

(*Starts.*) But why should I desire a female frame
The dreadful shock of parting to endure?

(*Kissing it again.*) No, my dear child,
I feel a gratitude to heav'n — thou art
Too young thy mother's sorrows yet to know.
But tell me, Clara, what will be the fate
Of this dear babe, soon as its poor mother
Has satisfied this tyrant law, and sunk
To death's embrace. Will you befriend my child?

Clara. Doubt me not, Agatha. Tell me your wishes,
And I religiously will obey them.

[AGATHA gives the child to CLARA.]

Agatha. Take her then, Clara, and before your God,
Swear you'll befriend her, and obey my will.

Clara. I swear, my Agatha. Thou lovely babe,
Clara will be a mother to you.

Agatha. Quick, then, release her from these murderous walls —

Restore her to her gallant father's arms —
 Tell him to rear her in the fear of God,
 And in devotion to the sacred cause
 Of liberty, such as in England reigns.
 Oh! thou who first in some ill-fated hour,
 To these receptacles of woe gave birth,
 Hadst thou foreseen those scenes of suffering,
 Which from thy rigid edicts would arise,
 How thou hadst grieved, if within thine heart
 One spark of human feeling had been left.
 Was it not then sufficient for thyself
 To have withdrawn from social intercourse —
 T' have set at nought a husband's — father's, joys —
 Must thou do more — and to sterility
 Devote thy fellow-creatures? (*Starts.*) How goes time?
 How quickly seems the fatal hour t' approach,
 Which sep'rates me from all I love on earth!
 Give me my child! (*Taking it. A bell rings. Agatha starts.*) The signal of my death

Now rings — I hear it! Monsters, do your worst!

Clara. 'Tis not for that, my Agatha, 'tis the bell
 To call the brothers of this house together,
 The Abbess of St. Agnes to receive.

Agatha. One of my judges, I suppose.

Clara. On that sad errand she too sure is come.

Agatha. And did that also bring thee hither?

Clara. I did accompany our Lady Abbess
 For the same sad occasion.

Agatha. She once was good — was generous to me.
 Can her kind nature be then altered?

Clara. She still does love you much, and bid me say,

take away the child.]

Agatha. Thou shalt not take her from me, Clara, yet.
Deprive me not of the consolation,
Sad as it is, and momentary too,
Which I derive from pressing to my heart
This first and last true token of our love.

Clara. Believe me, sister, you I would not deprive
Of any consolation in my power.
Thy child shall here remain, on condition,
That to despair you give not up yourself.
Still cherish hopes. I'll go and see our Abbess,
Proclaim an angel lives within these walls —
Bid her not sanction this so foul a murder —
Bid her not stain her hands, as yet so pure,
With thy dear innocent blood.

[They embrace. CLARA goes out in agony.]

Agatha. Dear Clara, even in this dreadful state,
 'Twixt life and death, thy kindness does me good —
 Alleviates something of that misery
 Which I am doom'd to bear. How sweet this moment,
 That gives me pow'r again t' embrace my child.
 Could'st thou but take a message to thy father,
 Thou then might'st tell him, e'en in this moment,
 The cheering hope that we may meet again
 In heav'n above, where justice will be done
 To those who on this earth do suffer most,
 Alone supports me.

Oh! my poor child! would'st thou could go with me—
 Would'st thou the evils of this earth could 'scape,
 And erst thou knew them taste of heav'n's pure joys.
 Yet wherefore should I wish to rob thy father
 Of his sweet child? No — live my lovely babe —
 Live — but be ign'rant of thy mother's woes. (*starting.*)
 Wast thou a boy, thou might'st avenge my wrongs —
 Might'st help from slavery to rescue Spain;
 And in the spirit of true charity,
 For all the ills she now is doing thee,
 A precious blessing thus on her confer.
 Then thou might'st teach my fallen countrymen
 To burst asunder superstition's bonds —
 Upon St. Mary's ancient walls to plant
 The flag of reformation, such as was
 Of old by Henry in England planted:
 And on the scite of solitude might'st raise
 Schools for the young — asylums for the old. (*Starts.*)
 How fast time steals upon me. Before now
 The conclave is agreed — my fate resolv'd —
 Th' executioner summon'd to perform

followed by the ABBOT, the ABBESS of ST. AGNES, the ABBESS OF ST. MARY, and CLARA and three other Nuns, attendants on the two Abbesses. Solemn singing. Procession moves off. — Manent LORD ABBOT and two LADY ABBESSES.

Lord Abbot. Welcome, my Lady Abbess of St. Agnes.

Abbess of St. Agnes. My Lord, I heartily do greet you.

Lord Abbot. Upon a fatal errand we are met,

The which I do assure you since I've heard,

Has caus'd me sleepless nights — compunctions sad —

And all that train of horrors which attend

The mind intent on murder.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Murder, d'ye say, my Lord! can
murder then

Upon a trait'ress who her vestal vow

Has dar'd to violate, be committed?

Rather, my Lord, say that we come to do

An act of justice — to enforce the laws,
Which pious St. Benedict enacted,
To save our souls from death.

Abbess of St. Mary. But surely, sister, in the human
heart

Compassion sits not ill, tho' we be forc'd
The mandate of stern justice to obey.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Compassion ! Canst thou, sister
Abbess, feel

Compassion for a harlot — and for one
Who has the foulest perjury committed —
And tho' devoted by herself to God,
Has of a Heretic become the mistress ?
I hail the moment which condemns to death
This foul adulterous trait'ress.

[*LORD ABBOT appears much agitated.*]

Abbess of St. Mary. Her perjury I do not justify,
And yet her case shows many a feature
Of extenuation.

Abbess of St. Agnes. What, sister Abbess, art thou
then become

A convert to these Protestants ?

Abbess of St. Mary. I am no convert, sister, yet confess

The many gen'rous deeds by England done,
The brav'ry which her gallant youth evinc'd,
While lately fighting for the cause of Spain,
Will make me hesitate, ere I pronounce
Perdition's certain doom on those whose creed
Differs from Rome's. He who has rais'd the dead,
Can work a miracle, and save these too.

'Tis a most cruel business : I scarce know
That I can fortify my mind to do it.

Abbess of St. Agnes. And you a traitor too! You
then do join

Our sister, and plead for mercy also.

Mark then my words, my Lord! I do require

This sinful harlot either shall suffer

The punishment St. Benedict decrees,

Or as a Heretic unto the flames

Be speedily devoted.

Abbess of St. Mary. Sister, our meaning you mis-
understand —

For mitigation we plead not. Too well

We know if but the fatal fact be prov'd —

And that myself, alas! too well can prove —

Of Agatha's flight from convent, the pain

Of instant death irrevocably is fix'd.

But feeling as a Christian woman ought,
 I have a horror that a fate so hard
 A sister should await.

Abbess of St. Agnes. A sister ! rather say a female
 fiend,

Right food for hell, and a companion fit
 For Belzebub himself. I'll hear no more
 On the behalf of this base perjur'd wretch.

Abbess of St. Mary. But should not we, ere we con-
 sign to death

This our frail hapless sister, be quite sure
 That we are wholly free from sin ourselves ?

Lord Abbot. (aside) Ah ! there is the question. Am
 I then free

From sin myself ? Do not I rather know
 Beneath the burthen of a sin so heinous
 I daily groan — that to the slight offence
 Of Agatha, mine is as Ætna's mountain
 To a small grain of sand.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Did ever slander's breath assail
 me then ?

Did ever sinful thought intrude my heart ?
 Did I on man e'er look ? Blest be St. Agnes,
 Within whose walls, and at whose sacred shrine,
 My orisons and vespers have been said
 Without omission for full sixty years :
 And if I've kept my virgin vow unbroken,
 Why did not hers this harlot also keep ?
 How I rejoice, too, that the Heretic
 Whom you (*to the Abbess*) her husband call, but who,
 in truth,
 Is Satan's self, array'd in form of man,
 With arms in hand was taken, while fighting

Such was the case in England's happy isle,
Where the first wish in her old Monarch's heart —
Till reason from his worn-out frame took flight —
Was for his people's good. Thence did that nation
Tow'r above all the nations of the earth.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Speak not of that curs'd land of
heresy —

A land that people's hell.

Lord Abbot. And yet forget not, 'tis to that nation
The safety of your nunnery you owe.
Had it not been for it, that had been spoil'd,
And all your holy sisters had dispers'd,
Friendless o'er half the world — then your good nuns,
Not wives, perhaps, but harlots had become,
Driven not by choice, but poverty.

Abbess of St. Mary. And, sister, say, had our sad case
been such,
Where, save in England, would the gen'rous hand

Of charity been held out unto us ?
Therefore for England, and that gallant youth,
Who for our sakes in war a limb did lose,
May we not feel, or shed one grateful tear ?

Abbess of St. Agnes. Shed your adult'rous tears ; but
heav'n be prais'd,

St. Benedict's decrees cannot be chang'd.
God save his Majesty, who also gives
To the safe hands of th' executioner,
This Heretic British Officer.

Lord Abbot. Sister, you err ; the royal clemency
Has been extended to him.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Who is the traitor that advis'd
this act ?

He is Spain's worst enemy.

Abbess of St. Mary. Rather her best : for he who
shall advise

Such acts as shall for sure consolidate
The friendship of these nations, will, ere long,
The best and truest friend of both be deem'd.
But by that gallant people to be priz'd,
We must be just — be liberal — be free.

Abbess of St. Agnes. (*disdainfully.*) And where have
you these grov'ling lessons learnt ?
Have then some her'tic books escap'd the flames
Of the Inquisition — the minds of nuns
With treason — lewdness — heresy, to poison ?
Let not such trash assail my virgin ears,
But let us now for justice be prepar'd ;
And to the tomb, or to the fire, condemn
This hated Heretic — this vile adulteress.

Abbess of St. Mary. Ah ! sister, have you seen her
child ?

And to a place of safety is convey'd :
Whence soon to England's favour'd isle she
She will insure that nation's love herself,
And its as certain hate to us.

Abbess of St. Agnes. No more let me
astound mine ears.

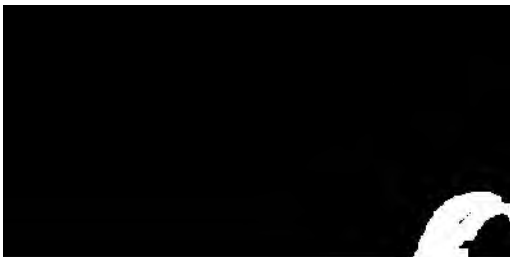
Let us retire, till it be time to sit
In solemn council, when we will enforce
The holy laws of good St. Benedict.

Abbess of St. Mary. Sister, on you alone
blood.

Abbess of St. Agnes. I am contented, sist

Lord Abbot. (*aside*) I still will
Some means this dreadful murder to avert
Or to hell's flames my soul will sure be do

END OF ACT III.



ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The Donge — in the wall of which is a small niche, sufficient to enclose a body : in this niche is placed a small candle, a loaf, and a jug of water — on each side the niche stands a Monk with a torch burning — by the side is some bricks and mortar. In the Donge is a small table, with a book containing St. Benedict's rules, lying on it ; around which is discovered, sitting, the LORD ABBOT and the two LADY ABBESSES. When the curtain rises, AGATHA is led in, blindfold, by a Monk, who places her by the side of the niche, then takes the bandage off, and retires.

Lord Abbot.

FRAIL and unhappy sister, you now stand
Before us, charg'd with two high offences —
First that from your convent you deserted ;
And secondly, that you your virgin vow
Have violated. For which heinous crimes
St. Benedict, to whose order you belong,
The dreadful punishment of inhumation
Has allotted. If you have aught to say,
We'll hear you patiently.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Brother, there is another great
offence
Of deadly hue, wherewith she's also charg'd —

Was a true Christian. He did instruct me,
The seat of pure religion was the heart ;
And he did tell me, that in pray'r alone
His God delighted not — but did require
His creatures should moreover daily show
Purest benevolence tow'rd's all mankind —
In acts of charity should take delight —
The sick should visit — should clothe the naked —
Ransom the prisoner — and the hungry feed.
Nor was this all — for he further taught me,
Religion, in exclusion from the world —
From its delights — innocent amusements —
Consisted not ; — but that Omnipotence,
Tho' he did interdict the world's abuse,
Ordain'd that man its pleasures should enjoy.
Such is the heresy wherewith ye charge me,
Of which there does exist a certain proof,
That to God's wisdom it is consonant.

For canst thou think when other nations fall,
 Heav'n would that nation where this faith prevails
 With its especial fostering care protect,
 If this its faith were false ?

Think'st ye, ye judges, then, that all the threats
 Which ye can utter will make me abjure
 That faith which from a firm conviction springs.
 No — tho' ye rack your senses to invent

A punishment a thousand times more cruel
 Than that which now awaits me, I will still
 Endure it patiently, and meek exclaim,
 " Thy blessed will — not mine — O God, be done."

Lord Abbot. Thy words are wonderful, and to my
 soul

A lesson speak I shall not soon forget.
 But, sinful sister, ere that thou say'st more,
 Thou as a nun must be identified.
 This our good sister here can do.

Abbess of St. Mary. I can, and with sorrow I do say so,
 Sorrow which almost weighs me down.

Agatha. Ah ! my good mother, for all the kindness,
 Friendship, indulgence, tenderness, and love;
 Which I from you so constantly receiv'd,
 Accept my grateful thanks : and well I know
 That could'st thou now avert my dreadful doom,
 Thou would'st evince the Christian.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Avert a Heretic's, a harlot's
 doom !

Expose thy soul to sure damnation !

Agatha. A harlot dost thou say ! I spurn the term.
 Canst thou not then thy utmost vengeance glut ?
 Canst thou not satiate thy appetite
 For human sacrifice, but must thou also

Not to appear me wrongfully.

Abbess of St. Mary. Poor innocent, thou wilt more
mercy find

In heav'n, than they, who mercy will themselves
Most want hereafter are inclin'd to show.

Lord Abbot. Frail sister, now proceed with your
defence.

What say'st thou — didst not thou thy convent fly ?

Agatha. I left my convent, as ye all do know,

Not till its walls refus'd me sanctuary.

But when the enemy had forc'd its gate,

And in the insolence of conquest came,

I had no choice but flight or violence.

Say then, ye judges, is compulsive flight

A crime contemplated by St. Benedict ?

And say ye, who for justice thus contend,

If in the sacred decalogue you find

One law that I have broken ?

Are then St. Benedict's laws the laws of God?
 Or did not rather monkish ignorance —
 Or selfish hatred tow'rd the human race —
 Or spiritual pride, which fancies all is wrong,
 That does not tally in its every point,
 With its own vicious views of nature —
 Dictate this barb'rous — this hateful edict?
 Did then St. Benedict think this a law
 To God acceptable? or did he not
 His own ambition rather gratify,
 To be enroll'd in catalogue of saints?
 And can ye too, my judges, hope for mercy,
 If ye refuse t' extend it unto others?
 Are ye yourselves so perfect — holy — pure,
 That ye can safely on your deeds alone
 Rely for mercy? And do ye fancy
 That formal matins, or measur'd vespers,
 In lieu of true benevolence, will suffice?
 Think'st ye, the' mass a thousand times be sung
 By holy brethren for your souls when dead;
 These of themselves will save you, or atone
 For all the daily sins of which ye're guilty?

Lord Abbot. That is most true.

Abbess of St. Agnes (aside to Lord Abbot) Held your
 tongue, traitor, or else remember,
 I know a secret will undo you.

Lord Abbot. (much agitated) Sister, we grant your
 flight is justified;
 But wherefore did you your monastic vow
 Forget and violate? Why did you not
 Unto your nunnery return, when war
 Had ceas'd.

Agatha. Say then, my Lord, if when a feeble state

Abbess of St. Agnes. Are we this heresy — this dark
treason,

From an adult'rous culprit forc'd to hear?

Agatha. Did you a heart possess of human feeling,
You would not use me thus — you'd be enrob'd
In sorrow's sacred mantle — altho' bound
This edict to enforce. Monastic houses
Religion's semblance may indeed inclose,
But its reality abides not there.

Abbess of St. Agnes. My Lord, the case is clear —
nothing remains

But for you now the sentence to pronounce.

Agatha. Hear me one moment longer, ere the seal
To this foul murder ye shall have affix'd.
My flight from convent was in self-defence.
I yielded not myself to sinful passion;
But when restrain'd no longer by a vow,
Which when I made I scarce did know its meaning,

I gave my heart with gratitude to him
 By whom my honor was so bravely saved.
 Had it not also for my husband been,
 My life I might have lost. If then I live,
 To him it is that I do owe my life.
 'Tis then a new life — that had surely ceas'd
 Which I, to please and gratify th' ambition
 Of my proud family, had sacrific'd
 Unto celibacy. When then I took
 My life again, I glad devoted it
 To him to whom I ow'd it : — in return,
 Protection he did give — and comfort too —
 And tend'rest love — drew from before mine eyes
 The veil which hitherto had darken'd them.
 Religion then appear'd in her true colours,
 And I became indeed a living being —
 A useful member of society —
 A faithful wife — and a happy mother.
 If then ye have not lost the very spark
 Of human feeling — if ye've not forgot
 That ye are all amenable to God,
 Spare — spare my life, and to a kind husband
 Restore his wife — give us our infant back :
 Then will the God of mercy to you grant
 Forgiveness for your sins, when ye appear
 Before his awful throne for judgment.

Abbess of St. Agnes. Mercy to her would be a crime
 to God.

My Lord, I am impatient.

Agatha. Canst ye be women then, and yet not feel
 For a poor woman? Does not compassion
 Dwell in your breasts? Are ye resolv'd to make

Tremble at what thou'rt doing ; and expect
That speedy justice will be done on thee.

Lord Abbot (dreadfully agitated) I cannot bear this.

Must I then commit

Another murder ?

Abbess of St. Agnes. (aside) Be still a man ; or I'll
undo thee.

Agatha. My fate is fix'd — I read it in you all.
Still, while I have the pow'r, hear me pronounce
Forgiveness on you. May no deep distress
Your latter days embitter — but may God
Give you repentance, and assurances
Of perfect pardon in the world to come —

[*Addresses herself to the Abbess of St. Mary.*]

Dear Lady Abbess, of you one favor
I humbly ask, which as 'twill be the last,
Your goodness sure will grant : — Restore this ring

[*Taking it off her finger*]

Unto my husband — with my kindest love —
 Tell him that t'ward him, since I've been his wife,
 I've faithful liv'd, and shall most faithful die.
*[During this the Abbess hides her face, takes the ring,
 and sobs aloud.]*

In God for mercy now I put my trust.
Abbess of St. Agnes. Brother, proceed — no more
 delay.

*[Lord Abbot, in violent agitation, rises from his seat, and
 pronounces sentence in Latin.]*
[SOROR VADE IN PACE.]

*[Agatha shrieks aloud, and faints in the arms of the
 Executioner. — Scene changes.]*

SCENE II. — A Room in the Abbey.

Enter LORD ABBOT, in dreadful agitation.

Lord Abbot. Ah! it has vanish'd! 'Twas but a
 phantom,

That on my mind did play; and did arise,
 By the too quick transition of the eye,
 To light, from dark. And yet a something says,
 Another murder thou hast now committed —
 Where wilt thou hide thy guilt — or how appease
 Thy trembling conscience — how avert God's wrath.
 Free from corroding care, the giddy world
 Pleasure's intoxicating cup now sips —
 Some for the cheerful party, merry dance,
 Or brilliant theatre are preparing;
 While others, from their daily toil return'd,
 Their sweet, tho' homely meal, do now enjoy —
 Around these sit, in happy contentment,

Oh ! what a murder of a poor innocent
Is perpetrating now within this house !
What a base, cow'rdly, driv'ling wretch am I,
To have assisted at this cruel deed.
A law to satisfy — enforc'd alone —
To gratify the mistaken justice
Of an old wretch — who if she ne'er did sin,
Or on man wanton look'd, it was because
To her no opportunity offered ;
Or because Nature her coarse veins had fill'd
With blood more cold than ice.

Enter FRIAR LAWRENCE.

Friar. Well, my Lord Abbot, is the murder done ?
Has this poor suff'ring creature breath'd her last ?

Lord Abbot. Thou speakest truly, it is a murder —
And 'tis a murder of the deepest dye.

Friar. Each brother so considers it, my Lord,
And in his heart sincerely execrates it.
Is all then over?

Lord Abbot. (agitated) The horrid deed is at this
time performing.

And the fair Agatha a sacrifice
Of innocence to crime — of love to wrath.
Ere this between the fatal wall's immur'd;
And while her pure spirit is contending,
From her fair body to take wing for heav'n,
There with its blest Redeemer to reside,
I sure have clos'd its portals by this act
'Gainst me for ever. Had you been present,
To have the pious resignation seen —
Forgiving heart this lovely nun possess'd —
And had you heard how clear, how calm she reason'd —
How forcibly to scripture she appeal'd —
You surely had abhor'd yourself for ever,
Had you consented to her death.

Friar Lawrence. Praised be God — Friar Lawrence
is exempt
From deed so bloody.

Lord Abbot. 'Tis more than I can bear to think
upon it;
And ever since the fatal deed was done,
I've felt an agonizing horror here. (*Striking his breast*)
For scarcely from the dunge had I retrac'd
My fault'ring steps, than I did think I saw
A spirit before me, one of whose fair hands—
Tow'rd's heav'n was held — while with an angry look
It pointed th' other down, and seem'd to say,
Murd'rer, you are summon'd—hell's mouth gapes wide,
And has prepar'd its hottest cauldron for you.

betray.

Say what your pleasure is — I'll assist you.

Lord Abbot. (cunningly) As yet she is not dead,
altho' immur'd.

Suff'ers there are, they say, who linger long,
Ere they give up the ghost.

Friar Lawrence. Then it is not too late to save her.

Lord Abbot. It is not — but how?

Friar Law. Art thou a man prepar'd for action bold—
Or would'st thou hesitate?

Lord Abbot. I am a man — but would'st not thou
betray me?

Friar Lawrence. I am no traitor—I despise a traitor;
And if you wish to rescue Agatha,
Lead on — I'll follow you.

Lord Abbot. Now thou hast cheer'd me — pointed out
the way

A wounded conscience to restore to peace.
But 'tis as yet too soon.

Friar Lawrence. Fix then the hour.

Lord Abbot. At half-past nine to night.

Friar Lawrence. Where shall we meet?

Lord Abbot. Here.

Friar Lawrence. Till then, my Lord, adieu. [*Exit.*]

Lord Abbot. All yet perhaps may prosper — all end well :

And yet I something feel I can't describe —

A trembling palpitation at my heart,

As if some evil would befall me soon.

'Tis said that such forebodings have been felt

By former Abbots, previous to their deaths

[*An owl comes and sits against the window, and whoops.*]

What's that I heard? It was the owlet's scream,

As if some dire event it did portend. —

I surely see it 'gainst the window sit.

Perhaps my eyes deceive me — I'll approach

[*Goes towards the window.*]

Ah! I do see it now. There — there it sits.

[*Shakes the window violently.*]

Fly quick away, thou dreadful messenger. (*Owl goes*)

Now it is gone. — Obedience does not always

On a first summons follow, as I've heard.

Should it appear again, I'll try to catch it,

Then ring its neck off, and avert the doom.

I now may hope for peace. (*a ghost appears*) * Ah!

no — I can't. —

* In acting, the ghost is not to be visible to the audience; this part is intended to evince the powerful effect of imagination on a guilty conscience. Of this an extraordinary proof was given some thirty years ago at Huntingdon.

But I'll defeat the plan — I will not go.

[*Owl goes — and ghost appears again*]

Comest thou again, thou restless spirit,
Unto the shades from whence thou art return.

I said I would obey you — now I swear it.

Doubt me not, then, thou spectre, any more.

This night will I repair to the dark donge —

If I should fail, inflict your worst upon me.

[*Ghost vanishes finally — and owl returns a third time and whoops, the Abbot seizes a pistol, and fires at it.*]

Now I have kill'd thee, thou ill aug'ring bird —

Now is the omen broken. I am free ;

And I shall live a holy Abbot long.

But lest some fatal or foul play befall me,

Or Friar Lawrence should a traitor prove,

Arm'd with a sword to dungeon I'll repair.

*Enter FRIAR LAWRENCE, and two LADY ABBESSES,
in alarm.*

Friar Lawrence. My Lord, what is the matter, we
did hear

A loud report of fire arms in the house,
And this room smells of smoke —

Lord Abbot. I fir'd a pistol to amuse myself—

Abbess of St. Agnes. That's as it should be—for you
may rejoice,

That to a traitor's fears you did not yield.
You've done an act of justice, my Lord Abbot,
Which to your credit ever will redound.
I do confess my heart with joy o'erflows,
And with true gratitude, that kind heaven
Has granted us the grace to make th' example
Which we this night have made. I'll now retire,
And with a conscience of all censure void,
Into sleep's balmy arms will softly fall,
Until the morn — when I will home retire,
And to my nuns exultingly report

What fate awaits them, if their vows they break. [*Exit.*

Abbess of St. Mary. Thou art a stoic — but not a
Christian.

Such feelings I don't envy. Brother, adieu.

I will in privacy, upon my knees,
Pardon, implore, and pray that my last end
May not like Agatha's be violent ;

But that it be as pure. [*Exit.*

Friar Lawrence. You do not repent my Lord —

Lord Abbot. Brother I do not — God speed us well.

END OF ACT IV.

But should it fail — still we have done our best ;
And the dark deed will not belong to us,
But unto others.—
There is, howe'er, another dreadful chance —
For if we be discover'd in th' attempt,
Our lives are forfeit — and on the scaffold
They will be sacrific'd. I almost wish
With the affair I nothing had to do :
And yet when I reflect that I do owe
Even my life to this brave Englishman,
I do abhor, detest, and loathe myself,
That fear, the coward's portion, on my mind
Should have a moment's influence.
If I do die, I die in act of mercy :
And he who mercy shews, shall mercy have.
I am resolv'd then — and hence will banish
All fear, alarm, and treacherous hesitation.
Who comes there ?

CAPTAIN BELMONT, CORPORAL TRUSTY, and JACK
HEARTY, *all exclaim, a friend — and then enter.*

Capt. Belm. This, holy father, is truly noble ;
For our most anxious hopes thou hast outstript,
And at your post the first of all appear.
It is a good beginning, and it proves
That to a race of heroes you belong.
And yet, my gen'rous friend, in an attempt
Fraught with such imm'nent peril to our lives,
It were most basely wrong, did I allow
A man so worthy to expose his own.
We three are met in mutual bond resolv'd,
Either the injur'd Agatha to rescue,
Or like brave Englishmen to perish.
The hidden entrance only then point out
Of this curs'd dungeon — leave the rest to us.
But for yourself — retire.

Friar Peter. That I will never do. The welcome
hour
I long have look'd for, to requite in part
Your gallant conduct tow'rds me, is arriv'd,
And there's no peril you shall encounter,
Which I'll not brave myself.

Capt. Belm. Most noble, brave, and generous father,
If thus you are resolv'd, lead us quick on.

Friar Peter. At present 'tis too soon, for to their rest
Our holy brothers have not yet retir'd.

[*A passing bell tolls.*]

Capt. Belm. Why tolls that bell? Its sound appals me.

Friar Peter. Ask not the question.

Capt. Belm. Answer, I conjure you.

That the Lord Abbot is himself involved
In grief most poignant for her sufferings.

Capt. Belm. Curse his hypocrisy — can that dæmon
heart,

Which could inflict a punishment like this,
An atom of humanity possess ?

Would that this impious murderer were here,
That I might plunge a dagger in his breast.

Had I not hope, that Agatha once more

May to her husband be restored alive,

Not all the walls, the gates, the bolts I see,

Should guard her murderer from my vengeance.

Lead, lead us on — I'll brook no more delay.

Corporal. Lead us on, your honor.

Jack Hearty. We'll follow.

[*Brandishing their swords.*]

Friar Peter. Restrain your zeal only a moment
longer.

Capt. Belm. Oh, how that bell does agitate, my frame,
 Thou lovely suffering angel — 'tis to me
 Thou owest thy misery — were there no chance
 Of rescue, I could almost bring myself
 To pray that heav'n would instant end thy life,
 And thy pure spotless soul at once receive.
 Then would I first, on these your murderers,
 Have sweet revenge — and next myself would die.

[*The bell ceases tolling.*]

Friar Peter. The bell has ceas'd, and all within is still,
 Now, my good friends, let's cautiously proceed.
 Follow me close — but not one step before.

[*They proceed to further end of the stage*]

This is the grove in which the entrance lies
 Into the donge — we must be near its mouth.

[*Strikes the ground with his foot, hard.*]

This ground sounds hollow. (*Takes up a pickaxe*) Here
 is a pickaxe,

Which for the business I have hid ready.

Let me be certain. (*Strikes again.*) Aye, 'tis sure the
 spot.

Be still as death, and softly strike your blows;
 Nor let them follow on each other quick:
 Should they be heard, they'll then deceive our brothers,
 Who for a death-watch will most likely take them.
 The stone gets looser. It at length does move.

Capt. Belm. Oh, God! I praise thee.

Friar Peter. Speak not one word, my son; lest you
 be heard.

Now is the stone quite loosen'd — lift it up.

[*They lift up the stone.*]

The door must now be forc'd — but it requires
 Not so much strength, as art, to do it.

So late the dreadful scene of murder.

Capt. Belm. Where is my Agatha? (*aloud*) Dear
Agatha,

Answer thy husband — tell him thou dost live.

He's come to rescue thee — bear but thy sufferings

Only one moment longer, and thou'rt sav'd.

She answers not — she's dead. Shew me the spot

Where she's immur'd — in God's name delay not.

Friar Peter. Rest thou assur'd, my son, I'll not delay
Longer than till I find the fatal niche

Where this poor sufferer is. 'Twould counteract

Your wish, to open walls at random.

[*Going slowly round the donge — pauses.*]

Let me consider :

That is the niche which I have heard contains

The body of a nun, who to a friar

Of this our holy house fell sacrifice —

She fled her convent — and loitering about,

Not knowing where to go, soon was taken,
 And in this fatal place she met her death.
 The wicked wretch to whom she ow'd her end,
 Like a poor coward, did destroy himself.
 Next in the order of this charnel house,
 Is plac'd a simple friar, who not long since
 Was, on the oath of a frail sister, charg'd
 As father of a child — which 'tis whisper'd,
 If justice had her due, should have belong'd
 To our Lord Abbot. — Be this as it may,
 The friar who had obnoxious made himself
 To his superior, was by him condemn'd
 And suffered death — while the unhappy nun
 Was never after heard of. 'Tis indeed
 A most mysterious business — it looks black.
 This I do think did end the catalogue
 Of wretched inmates of this wretched donge,
 Till in poor Agatha, one victim more
 Is added to those already murdered.
 This then must be her niche — and it does seem
 Newly made up — here then begin to work.
 Knock as thou wilt thou canst not here be heard.
'Capt. Belm. Oh! what an anxious moment 'tis to me.
 Strike hard — 'twill rouse her.
*[Top part of the wall begins to fall — but Agatha is not
 seen — having sunk down.]*
 She is not here — all, all is dark and empty.
 We either are mistaken, or she's dead
[More wall falls.]
 Ah! there her lovely auburn locks appear —
 And now her face I see — 'tis pale as death.
 My lovely Agatha! — thy husband speaks —
 Answer him Agatha, and say thou livest.

She still is warm, and life has not yet flown.
Now let us chafe her hands — rub her temples.

Capt. Belm. Oh! thou humane and generous monk —
I ne'er,

Should Agatha recover, can repay thee.

Friar Peter. An act of charity requires it not :
Here — here, (*strikes his breast,*) such act is always
paid in full.

She gets much warmer — I despair no longer

[*After a pause.*]

I now am certain she will soon recover.

Capt. Belm. Agatha — my lovely Agatha !

Friar Peter. Let me the cordial now administer.

Capt. Belm. She moves — she moves — my Agatha
then lives.

Her lovely eyes now open. My good friend —
My benefactor — let me embrace thee.

Friar Peter. Thy thanks, thy extacy restrain, my son:
'Tis quiet now your Agatha requires.

Capt. Belm. Speak — speak, my Agatha.

Agatha. (softly) Where am I?

Friar Peter. Reply not yet — lest in her feeble state,
Joy, like alarm, should be too much for her.

Agatha. What is the matter? where am I?

Capt. Belm. I can refrain myself no longer now.

[*Embraces her.*]

You are, my Agatha, in your husband's arms.

Agatha. My husband! — what! when! where!

Capt. Belm. My lovely Agatha, dost thou not know
Thy husband — thy own dear Charles?

Agatha. My Charles — my husband!

Where am I? — what is the matter?

Capt. Belm. Say my dear Agatha; you know your
husband:

He cannot live unless you know him.

Agatha. (wildly starting) It is my husband! it is my
dear Charles!

What darksome place is this?

Friar Peter. My son, I pray thee, talk not yet too
much:

In her weak state the slightest shock would kill her.

I will withdraw a little from her sight,

Lest this my well known habit, should alarm her.

[*An alarm from above.*]

Capt. Belm. (starting, but still supports Agatha.) What
noise is that? Sure we are not betray'd.

Does a fresh dæmon rise to mar our hopes

[*Footsteps heard.*]

Hark! there are footsteps — nearer they approach.

Agatha. What is the matter, Charles?

Corp. and Jack Hearty. We will obey.

Agatha. What noise is that? — what is the matter?
Who was it spoke?

Capt. Belm. Be calm, my love, you are among your
friends :

Trusty, your honest servant, waits on you,
And a brave English sailor, both prepar'd
Safe to conduct you to an English ship.

Agatha. Take me this moment — but pray don't leave
me.

Friar Peter. Be still, my son.

Range yourselves instantly along the wall.

[*All, except Captain Belmont and Agatha, who remain
lying on the ground, range themselves along the wall,
and darken their lanterns. A dead silence ensues —
LORD ABBOT and FRIAR LAWRENCE enter the donge
by the regular door, each with a lantern.*]

Lord Abbot. (*starts back*) It is her ghost.

Agatha. (*in alarm*) Whose voice is that? Oh! I shall die with fear.

Capt. Belm. Be not alarmed my love, no one shall hurt thee.

Agatha. I am sure I know the voice. Let me look.
[*She turns her head cautiously round, and on seeing the Lord Abbot, she utters a dreadful shriek and dies.*]

Lord Abbot. We are discover'd.

[*Corporal and Jack Hearty rush forward, and cut off the retreat. — Lanterns are opened.*]

Lord Abbot. (*to Friar Lawrence*) Traitor — thou hast betrayed me.

Friar Lawrence. Wretch — thou liest.

Capt Belm. She is dead! my Agatha is dead!

Friar Peter. (*now comes forward*) All — all my son is over. Thy sorrows

I do much pity — honor thy conduct —

And deplore thy love.

Capt. Belm. (*from Agatha's body now rising, draws his sword to the Lord Abbot.*) Who art thou, caitiff monk?

Lord Abbot. I am the Lord Abbot of this house.

Capt. Belm. Thou art a villian, and a murderer then.
If you the courage of a man possess,

Draw — for defenceless I will not strike thee.

Would I could hurl thee headlong into hell,

Now thou dost live, for then on thy liver

Vultures might prey — scorpions bite thy carcase —

Dogs gnaw thy flesh — and thirst dry up thy veins.

Come on, thou hell-hound — instant draw thy sword

Nor to the name of murd'rer, which thou bearest,

Add that of coward also.

Lord Abbot. Tho' I'm a murd'rer, I am no coward;

I may at least the satisfaction have,
To know the world is ridd'n of a monster.

[*They again fight — and both fall.*]

Lord Abbot. Now of revenge I trust thou hast thy fill.
Thy wish is granted thee — one moment more
Will bear me hence. Can'st thou then pardon me —
Can'st thou the evils I have done forgive?
What would I give to live my life again:
How different it should be. I dread to die,
Now that death really summons me away.
Recall, I pray thee, thy imprecations:
Implore my pardon of Almighty God,
Whom I've so oft offended.

Capt. Belm. Thou hast my pardon and my prayers
also—

Nay, I do thank thee, since to thee it is
From the world's misery I owe release.

Now I shall soon my Agatha rejoin,
In heaven's eternal mansions. I feel faint —
Close to my Agatha's dear body lay me

[*They move him.*]

Give me her hand, that we may die united.

Friar Lawrence. Ere that thou diest, young man, hear
a friend speak,

Who much deplores this fatal tragedy.

Thy conduct is a Christian's. Unto thee
I absolution grant — May'st thou in Heav'n
Thy Agatha rejoin, whom to have saved
And to thy faithful arms, t'have restored
Of this our visit was the sole design.

The Abbot, when her sentence he pronounc'd,

Was urged to do so by St. Agnes Abbess :

Alternative he had not, tho' he wished it.

Had you or we been later in th' attempt —

Or had we known for certain where you were —

This had not happened — therefore of this crime,

Now that thou know'st the truth, thou must acquit

The Lord Abbot.

Capt. Belm. My good Lord Abbot — I do acquit thee :
Thou art no murd'rer, but a generous friend.

Lord Abbot. I am a murd'rer, my son — and that niche
Contains the victim to my perfidy.

In that thou killest me, thou hast but done

An act of justice. Oh, may it expiate

My foul offence — but I do now feel weak —

Death steals upon me — all is over.

[*He dies.*]

Capt. Belm. Soon shall I also be no more.

Friar Lawrence. If thou hast life remaining, my poor
son,

A proof I'll give thee of our good intent.

But when once made, willingly to keep
To love, which that brave Englishman well knew
Could not without perjury be return'd,
He too his fate does owe — and must account
For Agatha's untimely fate to God.
Had he upon his passions kept controul,
Both Agatha and he had happy liv'd.
Then last, tho' first in guilt, lies the Lord Abbot ;
And were it wanted, adds another proof
Murd'ers shall sure detection meet on earth. —
Nought now remains save to inter the dead :
This I'll see done ; and in one sacred grave
Shall these two lovers be deposited.
Unto the Abbot's body, shall be shown
All due respect — death puts an end to crime,
And to God's wisdom bids us leave the rest.
We, brother Peter, in th' attempt to rescue
This nun from death, were sanction'd by our Abbot ;

And as I know it was the gen'ral wish
Of all the holy brothers of our abbey,
Of which I now shall soon be hail'd the chief,
Thou need'st fear nothing. As for these brave men —
If they will counsel from a friar take
Who tho' in convents he has pass'd his days,
Has not in idleness those days mispent,
But has endeavour'd candidly t' explore
Religion — Government — and Laws — and who
Of deep reflection this result now gives —
Should England fall — Europe will also fall,
And earth itself unto its centre shake.
Tyrants the world to scourge, will then arise
And universal ruin soon take place.
Then will your countrymen too late discover,
That in the attempt to catch the shadow,
The substance they have lost. Therefore, my friends,
To England's envied island now repair —
Let what you've seen in a still firmer bond
Bind you, if possible, unto your country.
Her conqu'ring standards basely ne'er desert —
But from the despot's and the traitor's grasp
Alike — her laws and liberties defend.

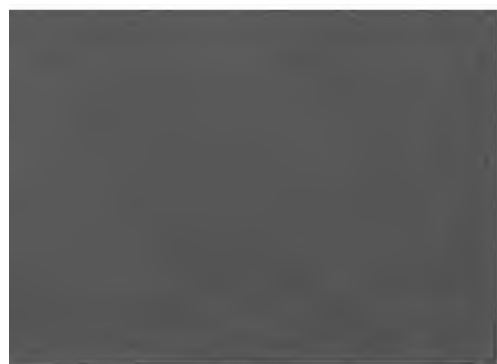
THE END.



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